



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Management

SELF EMPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF YOUTHS THROUGH HANDLOOM WEAVING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NER

KEY WORDS: Handloom Weaving, Underemployment, Unemployment, Out-migration, Self-Employment, Community Development, Rural Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

With the dwindling employment opportunities in government as well as other sectors, there is a prominent rise in unemployment and underemployment in the country. The youths of the North-eastern region too are experiencing the same and though there is out-migration in other prominent states of the country, the probability of gainful employment is less. Most end up being underemployed. Handloom weaving used to be a traditional occupation for the people of the North-eastern region of India. Out of the 25 lakhs weaver household covered in fourth handloom census 2019-20, four states comprises of 18 lakhs weaver households, two (Assam & Manipur) are from North East Region (NER). The cooperative societies dominate the non-household handloom units, and it has been identified that 2 (Assam & Nagaland) out of the 5 dominant states having cooperative societies are from the North-eastern region of India. The handloom sector provides the immense potential to generate sustainable livelihood to youths of NER. With an increase in focus of the Government in this sector for promotion of handloom products and different schemes like skill upgradation, cluster approach, and financial incentives, would provide youths in finding an opportunity of becoming empowered through self-employment and uplifting lives of the community and society and finally contributing to the economy of the region.

I. RATIONALE

India may be the fastest-growing major economy in the world but that may mean little to the country's 127 crore people, many of whom continue to struggle to find the right kind of jobs. India's unemployment rate stood at 5 per cent in 2015-16 compared to 3.8 per cent in 2012-13, according to the fifth annual survey of employment-unemployment published by the ministry of labour and employment (www.bloomberggqint.com). Today the unemployment and poverty problems are the major headache of India. The major causes of unemployment are explosion of population, lack of professional and technical education, development of a tendency of rural people to migrate to towns and cities in search of jobs instead of showing interest in self-employment, lack of practical knowledge to the educated people, physical weakness and unfit for heavy and hard manual work, people mentally weak don't go for white-collared jobs and prefer small jobs of less risk, social prejudices to start small business, existence of under industrialized regions, shortage of vocational and technical education institutes, anti-social attitude, etc., (Vidya & Kadam, 2018). The economy is grappling with the twin issues of inadequate job creation and low-quality jobs for those that exist, raising levels of working poverty that is, people who are working but whose income falls below the poverty line (Dutta). The unemployment has many impacts on the Government (less tax revenue, low economic growth), firms (less demands for goods and services, higher training costs) and, of course, the unemployed people themselves (loss of skills, loss of confidence) in the economy (Upadhyay and Unnikrishnan, 2017).

In the North-Eastern States of India, where the growth of the economy is not very dynamic, unemployment is a very common tale. With constant interruptions such as insurgency, political uncertainties, lack of industrial growth and economical backwardness, employment remains a sensitive issue for the region. (Lalrampuii, 2016). Youths migrate to bigger cities for opportunities. Most of the migrants likely migrated in big cities like Bangalore for various pursuits such as employment or studies apart from other reasons (Reimeingam, 2016). NE people migration is caused by rapid educational development, unemployment, underdeveloped economy and industrialisation, ailing educational system and infrastructure, socio-political unrest among other reasons (Marchang, 2017).

Along with the artistry of weavers, the Indian handloom industry demonstrates the richness and diversity of Indian culture. With over 4.3 million people directly and indirectly involved in the production, the handloom industry is the second-largest employment provider for the rural population in India after agriculture (www.ibef.org). The Handloom sector plays a very important role in India's economy. It is a part of our culture and heritage and one of the largest economic activities after agriculture having the capacity of absorbing a greater number of manpower. In 2009-10 this sector provided direct employment to over 65 lakh persons in India of which 60.40% are women. The reservoir of handloom skills is concentrated in the North-Eastern states of India, who together account for 16.83 lakh (60.5%) handloom households out of the total 27.83 lakh units engaged in the Country. Assam alone accounts for 12.41 lakh (44.6%) handloom households, whereas Manipur and Tripura have 1.79 lakh (6.4%) and 1.21 lakh (4.3%) such households, respectively (Phukan, 2012). Handloom weaving is also a source of livelihood, especially in industrially backward States of northeastern region (NE region) of India. Welfare schemes, financial assistance and health insurance of weavers are some of the interventions for the development of handlooms taken up by the government. The result of such interventions help the NE region occupy a remarkable place in the country in terms of number of handloom workers, number of handloom households and looms, yet the average working days are less as compared to other States. Owing to the large domination of part-time weavers, the economic contribution from the weaving activity cannot be derived fully. Having said this, the region has tremendous potential in promoting handloom sector as a trademark of the ethnicity (Devi, 2013). Ministry of Textiles through the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms is working for the sustainable development of the handloom sector by implementing various developmental, promotional, and welfare schemes. The principal objectives of these schemes are to promote production and marketing of high quality and high-value handloom products and thereby increase the earnings of weavers and other workers associated with this sector. Skill up-gradation, infusion of new and contemporary designs, product diversification, technology upgrades, improved access to subsidised raw materials, access to low-interest credit, common infrastructure development, brand building, marketing assistance including promotion of e-

Commerce platforms and linking handloom with high-end fashion, are but some of the major interventions initiated by the present Government (<https://handlooms.nic.in>).

In this background, this paper is conceived. The unemployment scenario and youths of North Eastern Region (NER) migrating to other states in search of jobs can be given check if opportunities can be created which could act as a constraint for outmigration and helpful in finding gainful employment. Migration never benefited the state or Place of Birth (POB) of migrants as the manpower could have contributed to the development of the state and instead contributes to solving the problem of the migrated state. Handloom sector provides huge opportunities for entrepreneurial and organising youths of NER. The government too has introduced many schemes which could help the youths not only find opportunities in their respective POB but also can contribute in the creation of attractive job opportunities, reducing migration and uplifting the economy of the region.

II. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The following objectives of the study are outlined.

1. To explain the concept of outmigration, self-employment in weaving etc..
2. To study the existing practices of handloom weaving in NER
3. To understand the different incentives to handloom weavers and assistance provided by the government
4. To know if the handloom weaving sector could provide self-employment opportunities, growth and empowerment to the unemployed youths
5. To understand if the handloom sector could help in community upliftment

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers have collected secondary data from different online sources of previous work of scholars, reports, and host of ministries reports, online Magazines, online Journals, online Periodicals, and Newspapers etc. These data's were analysed and visualised for the research paper purpose.

IV. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Unemployment is a challenge faced by the youths of NER and the following table provides us with data about the unemployment status.

UNEMPLOYMENT STATUS: NORTH-EAST STATES IN INDIA IN 2011-12

State	Proportion Unemployed (per 1000) for persons of age 15-59 years according to usual status (ps+ss) for each State			
	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arunachal Pradesh	13	7	26	19
Assam	39	11	46	10
Manipur	21	13	47	35
Meghalaya	3	2	18	12
Mizoram	12	17	32	28
Nagaland	129	82	140	110
Sikkim	9	7	26	1
Tripura	58	85	102	209
All India	16	7	25	12

Source: Tripathi (2016)

If we look at the above table we find that Nagaland tops the number of unemployed persons, rural or urban per 1000 persons followed by Tripura and Assam. The number of unemployed persons in both urban and rural is much higher than the other states of India.

Because of unemployment youths of NER migrates to the other part of the country in search of employment opportunities. The following table provides us with information about the out-migration of people from NER.

Sl. No.	States	Out-migrants (2001)
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	12,507
2.	Assam	281,510
3.	Manipur	30,867
4.	Meghalaya	20,434
5.	Mizoram	31,739
6.	Nagaland	51,857
7.	Sikkim	6,238
8.	Tripura	23,538

Source: Census of India 2001

From the above table, we can see that Assam tops the list of out-migration followed by Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura.

SHARE (%) OF REASON FOR MIGRATION FOR MIGRANTS FROM NER TO THE ROI (REST OF INDIA)

Reason	1991			2001		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Work/employment	13.3	25.8	3.4	11.4	31.0	1.8
Business	3.3	5.6	1.4	1.1	3.0	0.2
Education	4.6	7.3	2.4	2.9	6.5	1.2
Marriage	29.2	2.5	50.4	44.5	1.4	65.6
Moved after birth	--	--	--	1.2	2.1	0.7
Moved with household	30.5	32.5	28.9	22.5	28.6	19.6
Others	19.2	26.4	13.5	16.4	27.5	10.9
All (Nos. in lakh)	3.8	1.7	2.1	7.5	2.5	5.1

Source: Marchang (2017)

The above table suggests that a good number of the male's from NER moves out to the other part of India because if work employment. And the reason is because of unemployment or non-availability of the right employment in the region.

North Eastern Region has the highest concentration of Handlooms in the country. Out of 25.4 lakh units engaged in handloom activities, 14.6 lakh units (household and non-house hold) are concentrated in five States only, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura as per the Handloom Census 1995-96. Over 53% of looms in the country and more than 50% of weavers belong to the North Eastern States. The share of these five States of North Eastern Region in the domestic looms is 82% (textmin.nic.in). Handloom weaving has been part of the tradition of the peoples of Northeast. The government has taken many initiatives for the development of the sector.

Ministry of Textiles through the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms is working for the sustainable development of the handloom sector by implementing various developmental, promotional, and welfare schemes. The principal objectives of these schemes is to promote production and marketing of high quality and high-value handloom products and thereby increase the earnings of weavers and other workers associated with this sector. Skill up-gradation, infusion of new and contemporary designs, product diversification, technology upgrades, improved access to subsidised raw materials, access to low-interest credit, common infrastructure development, brand building, marketing assistance including promotion of e-Commerce platforms and linking handloom with high-end fashion, are

but some of the major interventions initiated by the present Government. (<https://handlooms.nic.in/>)

THE FOLLOWING COULD BE THE APPROACH OF THE YOUTHS TOWARDS SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN HANDLOOM ACTIVITIES:

- The unemployed youths of NER with their traditional skills can encash on the incentives provided by the government by getting involved in the sector. They can start handloom clusters and involve weavers for producing handloom clothes. The government departments like Weaver Service Centers and Department of Handlooms can be approached for advice and assistance.
- They can avail the scheme of Hatkharga Samvardhan Sahayata where 90% of the cost of looms and accessories is borne by Government of India but the implementation is done with the full involvement of respective State Governments.
- They can also approach the WSCs and Handloom department of the respective states for schemes like skill up-gradation training and exposure where the weavers and allied workers can learn new weaving techniques, adaption of new technology, development of new designs and colours, learning about new types of eco-friendly dyes and dyeing practices, exposure to basic accounting and management practices, familiarisation with e-commerce, etc.
- A workshed would be required which would provide a working space for the entire weaver family close to their home. The unit cost for these sheds are Rs. 1.2 lakhs and
- Marginalised households and female weavers are eligible for 100% financial assistance from the government. Thus the government department can be approached for financial assistance.
- Yarn a raw material for handloom weaving, regular supply of which is a challenge faced the weavers. The Government has a scheme where the yarn is supplied at mill gate price to weavers to compensate them for the high cost of transportation from the mill gate to their workplace. In addition, a 10% price subsidy is provided on cotton, domestic silk, woollen and linen yarn in hank form so that handloom weavers can compete with power looms in pricing. To facilitate the regular and timely supply of yarn, yarn depots have been opened in handloom concentrated areas. To reduce the delivery period and also facilitate the delivery of small orders, warehouses have been opened in all States having significant handloom presence. National Handloom Development Corporation too provides such support. This scheme can help youths in solving raw material issues.
- MUDRA loan is a scheme of the government under which working capital and term loans at 6% interest rate are being provided through banks. To leverage these loans, margin money up to Rs.10,000 is also provided. The Ministry also bears the credit guarantee fee to be paid to the banks to encouraging lending. The Online Handloom Weavers MUDRA portal has been developed for Direct Benefit Transfer of margin money to weavers' accounts and interest subvention and credit guarantee fees to banks. The unemployed youths can avail these loans for running the handloom cluster and solve the working capital requirement issues.
- The welfare of its employees is important for any entrepreneur. The youths after starting the clusters can avail different welfare measures of the government where the handloom weavers working in the clusters could be brought under the coverage of Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), and Mahatma Gandhi Bunker Bima Yojana (MGBBY) (for those in the age group of 51 – 59 years). Under these schemes, weavers are required to pay only Rs.80 to enrol in these schemes while the rest of the premium is borne by Government of India.

- There is a provision for engaging professional designers in the block level clusters and beyond to design new innovative designs and products. The scheme not only pays for their fees, but the further outlay is available for providing additional remuneration to designers for establishing marketing linkages. The youths can take advantage of this scheme and engage designers who would help in developing marketable handloom products.
- Once production begins and they can participate in the Expos and District level events which are organised regularly to provide a marketing platform to the handloom weavers. They can participate in various crafts melas held across the country which would help them sell their products, develop networking opportunities and learn new trends. The Government has taken a new initiative, 23 e-commerce companies have been engaged to promote e-marketing of handloom products. This initiative would help them to sell their products online.

VI. CONCLUSION

Unemployment is a challenge and youths of NER moves out of the region and migrates to the other developed states of the country in search of job opportunities. Though there are challenges in the form of racial discrimination and underemployment still these factors don't deter them to migrate. Opportunities in the handloom sector exist in their Place of Birth because of handloom weaving being a part of the tradition in NER and the peoples are blessed with weaving skills. The government has introduced many developmental, promotional, and welfare schemes and the unemployed youths could take the opportunity and become self-employed. That way they don't have to migrate for employment opportunities. The youths would not only create jobs but also would contribute in the development of the handloom sector and their respective state's economy.

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